

CORRESPONDENCE

RELATING TO THE

PROPOSALS OF HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT FOR AN IRISH SETTLEMENT.

Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.



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Correspondence relating to the Proposals of His Majesty's Government for an Irish Settlement.

I.

Proposals of the British Government for an Irish Settlement, July 20, 1921.

THE British Government are actuated by an earnest desire to end the unhappy divisions between Great Britain and Ireland which have produced so many conflicts in the past and which have once more shattered the peace and well-being of Ireland at the present time. They long with His Majesty the King, in the words of His Gracious Speech in Ireland last month, for a satisfactory solution of "those age-long Irish problems which for generations embarrassed our forefathers, as they now weigh heavily upon us"; and they wish to do their utmost to secure that "every man of Irish birth, whatever be his creed and wherever be his home, should work in loyal co-operation with the free communities on which the British Empire is based." They are convinced that the Irish people may find as worthy and as complete an expression of their political and spiritual ideals within the Empire as any of the numerous and varied nations united in allegiance to His Majesty's Throne; and they desire such a consummation, not only for the welfare of Great Britain, Ireland and the Empire as a whole, but also for the cause of peace and harmony throughout the world. There is no part of the world where Irishmen have made their home but suffers from our ancient feuds; no part of it but looks to this meeting between the British Government and the Irish leaders to resolve these feuds in a new understanding, honourable and satisfactory to all the peoples involved.

The free nations which compose the British Empire are drawn from many races, with different histories, traditions and ideals. In the Dominion of Canada, British and French have long forgotten the bitter conflicts which divided their ancestors. In South Africa the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State have joined with two British colonies to make a great self-governing union under His Majesty's sway. The British people cannot believe that where Canada and South Africa, with equal or even greater difficulties have so signally succeeded, Ireland will fail; and they are determined that, so far as they themselves can assure it, nothing shall hinder Irish statesmen from joining together to build up an Irish State in free and willing co-operation with the other peoples of the Empire.

Moved by these considerations, the British Government invite Ireland to take her place in the great association of free nations over which His Majesty reigns. As earnest of their desire to obliterate old quarrels and to enable Ireland to face the future with her own strength and hope, they propose that Ireland shall assume forthwith the status of a Dominion, with all the powers and privileges set forth in this document. By the adoption of Dominion status it is understood that Ireland shall enjoy complete autonomy in taxation and finance; that she shall maintain her own courts of law and judges; that she shall maintain her own military forces for home defence, her own constabulary and her own police; that she shall take over the Irish postal services and all matters relating thereto, education, land, agriculture, mines and minerals, forestry, housing, labour, unemployment, transport, trade, public health, health insurance and the liquor traffic; and, in sum, that she shall exercise all those powers and privileges upon which the autonomy of the self-governing Dominions is based, subject only to the considerations set out in the ensuing paragraphs. Guaranteed in these liberties, which no foreign people can challenge without challenging the Empire as a whole, the Dominions hold each and severally by virtue of their British fellowship a standing amongst the nations equivalent, not merely to their individual strength, but to the combined power and influence of all the nations of the Commonwealth. That guarantee, that fellowship, that freedom the whole Empire looks to Ireland to accept.

To this settlement the British Government are prepared to give immediate effect upon the following conditions, which are, in their opinion, vital to the welfare and

safety of both Great Britain and Ireland, forming as they do the heart of the Commonwealth :—

- I. The common concern of Great Britain and Ireland in the defence of their interests by land and sea shall be mutually recognised. Great Britain lives by sea-borne food; her communications depend upon the freedom of the great sea routes. Ireland lies at Britain's side across the sea-ways north and south that link her with the sister nations of the Empire, the markets of the world and the vital sources of her food supply. In recognition of this fact, which nature has imposed and no statesmanship can change, it is essential that the Royal Navy alone should control the seas around Ireland and Great Britain, and that such rights and liberties should be accorded to it by the Irish State as are essential for naval purposes in the Irish harbours and on the Irish coasts.
- II. In order that the movement towards the limitation of armaments which is now making progress in the world should in no way be hampered, it is stipulated that the Irish Territorial Force shall, within reasonable limits, conform in respect of numbers to the military establishments of the other parts of these islands.
- III. The position of Ireland is also of great importance for the air services, both military and civil. The Royal Air Force will need facilities for all purposes that it serves, and Ireland will form an essential link in the development of air routes between the British Isles and the North American continent. It is therefore stipulated that Great Britain shall have all necessary facilities for the development of defence and of communications by air.
- IV. Great Britain hopes that Ireland will, in due course and of her own free will, contribute in proportion to her wealth to the Regular Naval, Military and Air Forces of the Empire. It is further assumed that voluntary recruitment for these forces will be permitted throughout Ireland, particularly for those famous Irish regiments which have so long and so gallantly served His Majesty in all parts of the world.
- V. While the Irish people shall enjoy complete autonomy in taxation and finance, it is essential to prevent a recurrence of ancient differences between the two islands, and in particular to avert the possibility of ruinous trade wars. With this object in view, the British and Irish Governments shall agree to impose no protective duties or other restrictions upon the flow of transport, trade and commerce between all parts of these islands.
- VI. The Irish people shall agree to assume responsibility for a share of the present debt of the United Kingdom and of the liability for pensions arising out of the great war, the share, in default of agreement between the Governments concerned, to be determined by an independent arbitrator appointed from within His Majesty's dominions.

In accordance with these principles, the British Government propose that the conditions of settlement between Great Britain and Ireland shall be embodied in the form of a treaty, to which effect shall in due course be given by the British and Irish Parliaments. They look to such an instrument to obliterate old conflicts forthwith, to clear the way for a detailed settlement in full accordance with Irish conditions and needs, and thus to establish a new and happier relation between Irish patriotism and that wider community of aims and interests by which the unity of the whole Empire is freely sustained.

The form in which the settlement is to take effect will depend upon Ireland herself. It must allow for full recognition of the existing powers and privileges of the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland, which cannot be abrogated except by their own consent. For their part, the British Government entertain an earnest hope that the necessity of harmonious co-operation amongst Irishmen of all classes and creeds will be recognised throughout Ireland, and they will welcome the day when by these means unity is achieved, but no such common action can be secured by force. Union came in Canada by the free consent of the provinces. So in Australia; so in South Africa. It will come in Ireland by no other way than consent. There can, in fact, be no settlement on terms involving, on the one side or the other, that bitter appeal to bloodshed and violence which all men of goodwill are longing to terminate. The British Government will undertake to give effect, so far as that depends on them, to any terms in this respect on which all Ireland unites. But in no conditions can they consent to any proposals which would kindle civil war in Ireland. Such a

war would not touch Ireland alone, for partisans would flock to either side from Great Britain, the Empire and elsewhere with consequences more devastating to the welfare both of Ireland and the Empire than the conflict to which a truce has been called this month. Throughout the Empire there is a deep desire that the day of violence should pass and that a solution should be found, consonant with the highest ideals and interests of all parts of Ireland, which will enable her to co-operate as a willing partner in the British Commonwealth.

The British Government will therefore leave Irishmen themselves to determine by negotiations between them whether the new powers which the pact defines shall be taken over by Ireland as a whole and administered by a single Irish body, or taken over separately by Southern and Northern Ireland, with or without a joint authority to harmonise their common interests. They will willingly assist in the negotiation of such a settlement, if Irishmen should so desire.

By these proposals the British Government sincerely believe that they will have shattered the foundations of that ancient hatred and distrust which have disfigured our common history for centuries past. The future of Ireland within the Commonwealth is for the Irish people to shape.

In the foregoing proposals the British Government have attempted no more than the broad outline of a settlement. The details they leave for discussion when the Irish people have signified their acceptance of the principle of this pact.

(Signed) D. LLOYD GEORGE.

10, Downing Street, S.W. 1,
July 20, 1921.

II.

Reply from Mr. De Valera.

(Official translation.)

The Right Hon. David Lloyd George,
10, Downing Street,
Whitehall, London.

*Office of the President, Dublin,
Mansion House, August 10, 1921.*

Sir,

On the occasion of our last interview I gave it as my judgment that Dail Eireann could not, and that the Irish people would not, accept the proposals of your Government as set forth in the draft of the 20th July, which you had presented to me. Having consulted my colleagues, and with them given these proposals the most earnest consideration, I now confirm that judgment.

The outline given in the draft is self-contradictory, and "the principle of the pact" not easy to determine. To the extent that it implies a recognition of Ireland's separate nationhood and her right to self-determination we appreciate and accept it. But in the stipulations and express conditions concerning the matters that are vital the principle is strangely set aside and a claim advanced by your Government to an interference in our affairs and to a control which we cannot admit.

Ireland's right to choose for herself the path she shall take to realise her own destiny must be accepted as indefeasible. It is a right that has been maintained through centuries of oppression and at the cost of unparalleled sacrifice and untold suffering, and it will not be surrendered. We cannot propose to abrogate or impair it, nor can Britain or any other foreign State or group of States legitimately claim to interfere with its exercise in order to serve their own special interests.

The Irish people's belief is that the national destiny can best be realised in political detachment, free from imperialistic entanglements which they feel will involve enterprises out of harmony with the national character, prove destructive of their ideals, and be fruitful only of ruinous wars, crushing burdens, social discontent, and general unrest and unhappiness. Like the small States of Europe, they are prepared to hazard their independence on the basis of moral right, confident that as they would threaten no nation or people, they would in turn be free from aggression themselves. This is the policy they have declared for in plebiscite after plebiscite, and the degree to which any other line of policy deviates from it must be taken as a measure of the extent to which external pressure is operative and violence is being done to the wishes of the majority.

As for myself and my colleagues, it is our deep conviction that true friendship with England, which military coercion has frustrated for centuries, can be obtained most readily now through amicable but absolute separation. The fear, groundless though we believe it to be, that Irish territory may be used as the basis for an attack upon England's liberties can be met by reasonable guarantees not inconsistent with Irish sovereignty.

"Dominion status" for Ireland everyone who understands the conditions knows to be illusory. The freedom which the British Dominions enjoy is not so much the result of legal enactments or of treaties as of the immense distances which separate them from Britain, and have made interference by her impracticable. The most explicit guarantees, including the Dominions' acknowledged right to secede, would be necessary to secure for Ireland an equal degree of freedom. There is no suggestion, however, in the proposals made of any such guarantees. Instead, the natural position is reversed; our geographical situation with respect to Britain is made the basis of denials and restrictions unheard of in the case of the Dominions; the smaller island must give military safeguards and guarantees to the larger and suffer itself to be reduced to the position of a helpless dependency.

It should be obvious that we could not urge the acceptance of such proposals upon our people. A certain treaty of free association with the British Commonwealth group, as with a partial League of Nations, we would have been ready to recommend, and as a Government to negotiate and take responsibility for, had we an assurance that the entry of the nation as a whole into such association would secure for it the allegiance of the present dissenting minority, to meet whose sentiment alone this step could be contemplated.

Treaties dealing with the proposals for free intertrade and mutual limitation of armaments we are ready at any time to negotiate. Mutual agreement for facilitating air communications, as well as railway and other communications, can we feel certain also be effected. No obstacle of any kind will be placed by us in the way of that smooth commercial intercourse which is essential in the life of both islands, each the best customer and the best market of the other. It must of course be understood that all treaties and agreements would have to be submitted for ratification to the National Legislature in the first instance, and subsequently to the Irish people as a whole, under circumstances which would make it evident that their decision would be a free decision, and that every element of military compulsion was absent.

The question of Ireland's liability "for a share of the present debt of the United Kingdom" we are prepared to leave to be determined by a board of arbitrators, one appointed by Ireland, one by Great Britain, and a third to be chosen by agreement, or in default, to be nominated, say, by the President of the United States of America, if the President would consent.

As regards the question at issue between the political minority and the great majority of the Irish people, that must remain a question for the Irish people themselves to settle. We cannot admit the right of the British Government to mutilate our country, either in its own interest or at the call of any section of our population. We do not contemplate the use of force. If your Government stands aside, we can effect a complete reconciliation. We agree with you "that no common action can be secured by force." Our regret is that this wise and true principle which your Government prescribes to us for the settlement of our local problem it seems unwilling to apply consistently to the fundamental problem of the relations between our island and yours. The principle we rely on in the one case we are ready to apply in the other, but should this principle not yield an immediate settlement we are willing that this question too be submitted to external arbitration.

Thus we are ready to meet you in all that is reasonable and just. The responsibility for initiating and effecting an honourable peace rests primarily not with our Government but with yours. We have no conditions to impose, no claims to advance but the one, that we be freed from aggression. We reciprocate with a sincerity to be measured only by the terrible sufferings our people have undergone the desire you express for mutual and lasting friendship. The sole cause of the "ancient feuds" which you deplore has been, as we know, and as history proves, the attacks of English rulers upon Irish liberties. These attacks can cease forthwith, if your Government has the will. The road to peace and understanding lies open.

I am, Sir,

Faithfully yours,

(Signed)

EAMON DE VALERA.

III.

The Prime Minister's Reply to Mr. De Valera's Letter of August 10, 1921.

Sir,

10, Downing Street, August 13, 1921.

The earlier part of your letter is so much opposed to our fundamental position that we feel bound to leave you in no doubt of our meaning. You state that after consulting your colleagues you confirm your declaration that our proposals are such as Dail Éireann could not, and the Irish people would not, accept. You add that the outline given in our draft is self-contradictory, and the principle of the pact offered to you not easy to determine. We desire, therefore, to make our position absolutely clear.

In our opinion, nothing is to be gained by prolonging a theoretical discussion of the national status which you may be willing to accept as compared with that of the great self-governing Dominions of the British Commonwealth, but we must direct your attention to one point upon which you lay some emphasis, and upon which no British Government can compromise, namely, the claim that we should acknowledge the right of Ireland to secede from her allegiance to the King. No such right can ever be acknowledged by us. The geographical propinquity of Ireland to the British Isles is a fundamental fact. The history of the two islands for many centuries, however it is read, is sufficient proof that their destinies are indissolubly linked. Ireland has sent members to the British Parliament for more than a hundred years. Many thousands of her people during all that time have enlisted freely and served gallantly in the forces of the Crown. Great numbers in all the Irish provinces are profoundly attached to the Throne. These facts permit of one answer, and one only, to the claim that Britain should negotiate with Ireland as a separate and foreign Power.

When you, as the chosen representative of Irish national ideals, came to speak with me, I made one condition only, of which our proposals plainly stated the effect—that Ireland should recognise the force of geographical and historical facts. It is those facts which govern the problem of British and Irish relations. If they did not exist, there would be no problem to discuss.

I pass therefore to the conditions which are imposed by these facts. We set them out clearly in six clauses in our former proposals, and need not restate them here, except to say that the British Government cannot consent to the reference of any such questions, which concern Great Britain and Ireland alone, to the arbitration of a foreign Power.

We are profoundly glad to have your agreement that Northern Ireland cannot be coerced. This point is of great importance, because the resolve of our people to resist with their full power any attempt at secession by one part of Ireland carries with it of necessity an equal resolve to resist any effort to coerce another part of Ireland to abandon its allegiance to the Crown. We gladly give you the assurance that we will concur in any settlement which Southern and Northern Ireland may make for Irish unity within the six conditions already laid down, which apply to Southern and Northern Ireland alike, but we cannot agree to refer the question of your relations with Northern Ireland to foreign arbitration.

The conditions of the proposed settlement do not arise from any desire to force our will upon people of another race, but from facts which are as vital to Ireland's welfare as to our own. They contain no derogation from Ireland's status as a Dominion, no desire for British ascendancy over Ireland, and no impairment of Ireland's national ideals.

Our proposals present to the Irish people an opportunity such as has never dawned in their history before. We have made them in the sincere desire to achieve peace; but beyond them we cannot go. We trust that you will be able to accept them in principle. I shall be ready to discuss their application in detail whenever your acceptance in principle is communicated to me.

I am,
Yours faithfully,
(Signed) D. LLOYD GEORGE.

Eamon de Valera, Esq.,
The Mansion House, Dublin.